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SURVEY STUDY OF CORRESPONDENCE DROPOUTS AND CANCELLATIONS.

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TO DETERMINE WHY ONE-THIRD OF THE STUDENTS ENROLLING IN CORRESPONDENCE WORK DURING ANY CALENDAR YEAR DO NOT COMPLETE THE COURSES AND TO ELICIT SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING THE NUMBER OF DROPOUTS AND CANCELLATIONS, QUESTIONNAIRES WERE MAILED TO 762 CORRESPONDENCE STUDY DROPOUTS. DATA FROM THE 135 QUESTIONNAIRES RETURNED ARE TABULATED IN THIS STUDY. DEGREE AND CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT WERE REASONS MOST OFTEN CITED FOR ENROLLMENT. THE MAJOR REASON FOR NON-COMPLETION WAS LACK OF TIME. IN COMPARING RESIDENCE AND CORRESPONDENCE INSTRUCTION, RESPONDENTS THOUGHT CORRESPONDENCE STUDY WAS MORE WORK AND LESS INTERESTING, BECAUSE OF LACK OF CLASSROOM CONTACT. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE STUDY ARE THAT--(1) CORRESPONDENCE STUDY GUIDES HAVE A VARIETY OF ASSIGNMENTS INCLUDING MORE THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS, (2) INSTRUCTORS OFFER MORE SUGGESTIONS AND CRITICISMS BY REGISTERING COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENTS RETURNED TO STUDENTS, (3) PROVISION BE MADE FOR TIME EXTENSIONS, (4) LESS WRITING BE REQUIRED IN ASSIGNMENT PREPARATION, (5) MORE NON-TECHNICAL COURSES BE MADE AVAILABLE BY CORRESPONDENCE, AND (6) APPLICANTS FOR CORRESPONDENCE STUDY BE SCREENED. (AJ)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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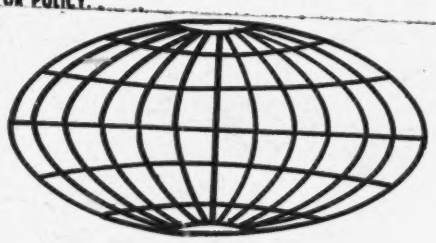

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Correspondence Study Program
University Extension — University of Kentucky

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SURVEY STUDY

OF

CORRESPONDENCE DROPOUTS AND

CANCELLATIONS

An attempt to ascertain some of the reasons for non-completion of correspondence courses and to offer suggestions which would probably reduce the number of correspondence study dropouts and cancellations.

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Correspondence Study Program
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SURVEY STUDY OF CORRESPONDENCE DROPOUTS AND CANCELLATIONS

PROBLEM

For any calendar year, approximately one-third of the students who enroll for correspondence courses do not pursue their work to a satisfactory completion. For the calendar year 1964, 3,035 students enrolled for correspondence courses. Of this number, 1,170 or 38.8% failed to complete their work as originally intended. The percentage of non-completions seemed to be high, even for this medium of instruction.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The primary purpose of the study was an attempt to ascertain the reasons for non-completion of correspondence courses by approximately one-third of the students enrolling for correspondence work during any calendar year. Secondary, the study endeavored to elicit suggestions from the students which would probably reduce, if initiated, the number of dropouts and cancellations. In addition, information was sought with respect to three other items contained in the questionnaire. The five items included in the survey instrument are as follows:

1. Original purpose in enrolling for correspondence work
2. Reason for non-completion of work as originally planned
3. Factors which contributed to non-completion of work
4. Comparison of correspondence instruction to residence instruction
5. Suggestions for reducing the number of correspondence study dropouts or cancellations.

A copy of the survey questionnaire is contained as a part of the report, Appendix A.

SCOPE

The survey questionnaire instrument was mailed to 762 students whose courses were cancelled at the expiration of the one-year enrollment period or whose courses were cancelled per request of the students. The questionnaires were mailed over a six-month period beginning January 1, 1965 and ending June 30, 1965.

Of the 762 questionnaires mailed, only 135 or 18% were completed and returned. The number of returned instruments is comparatively small but does constitute a fair sampling of the students who cancelled their courses. Of the respondents, 76 were male students; 59 were female students. One hundred thirteen of the total responses were from college students, and twenty-five were from high school students. Questionnaires were received from students living in 21 different states and one foreign country. The greatest number of responses, 83, was received from Kentucky students. Seven responses were received from each of the states West Virginia and New York. Only one questionnaire was received from a student living in a foreign country, namely, Italy.

Cancellations or dropouts were tabulated with respect to the courses in which the students were enrolled. Respondents indicated cancellations of 58 different courses at the college level and 14 different courses at the high school level. The number of cancellations for each course is given in Table I.

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

The data obtained from the 135 returned questionnaires were tabulated in keeping with the five major questions contained in the instrument.

Seven possible responses were suggested for original purpose in enrolling for correspondence work. If none of these applied, the student was asked to give the specific reason in a blank space provided for this purpose. The reasons given by the 135 students were tabulated, and the information is recorded in Table II.

Many reasons were given for the non-completion of correspondence courses. The reasons occurring most often are presented in Table III in order of their frequency of occurrence.

The students were asked to list those factors that contributed to non-completion of their courses. The responses were grouped according to similarity of meaning and arranged in order of fre-

TABLE I

Dropouts and Cancellations by Courses

College Courses

Course	*Number*
Anthropology 121	2
Botany 125	2
Botany 219	1
Botany 530	3
Classics	4
Commerce 107	5
Commerce 108	3
Commerce 112	1
Commerce 445	2
Commerce 518	1
Commerce 519	1
Economics 103	1
Economics 251	3
Education 317	1
Education 548	1
Engineering 105	1
English 101	7
English 102	5
English 161	2
English 201	1
English 205	1
English 221	2
English 222	2
English 527	1
English 551	2
Georgraphy 151	2
Geography 152	1
Geography 153	2
Geography 155	2
Geography 251	1
History 104	1
History 108	3
History 109	4
History 240	1
History 547	2
Hygiene 109	2
Hygiene 500	1
Journalism 533	1
Mathematics 001	2
Mathematics 002	2
Mathematics 111	3
Mathematics 112	3
Mathematics 113	3
Mathematics 211	2
Mathematics 212	1
French 101	2
French 201	2
French 202	1
French 506	1
German 121	2
Spanish 241	3
Spanish 242	1
Philosophy 230	2
Photography 001	1
Political Science 151	1
Psychology 521	1
Sociology 151	1
Sociology 538	1

High School Courses

Algebra I	1
Algebra II	3
American History	1
Business Arithmetic	1
Civics	1
General Mathematics	3
Grammar II	1
Grammar IV	3
Literature I	3
Literature II	1
Literature III	2
Literature IV	1
Plane Geometry	2
Spanish	1

TABLE II

Original Purpose in Enrolling for Correspondence Work

Purpose		*Frequency*
Degree Requirement		60
Self-improvement		43
Certification Purposes		15
Repeat because of failure or low grade		10
Refresher Course		9
Unable to Schedule		8
Financial—cost less		7
Accelerate Program		6
Suggested by Advisor		3
High School Graduation		3
Other:		
Army Service	5	
Illness	1	
Employment	1	
		7

Note: *Many students checked two or three reasons for taking a course*

TABLE III

Reasons Given for Non-completion of Work

Reason	*Frequency*
Job required too much time—interfered with study	41
Lack of time	40
Taking residence classes at the same time	29
Lost interest—found correspondence work boring, uninspiring	12
Illness	9
Rescheduled correspondence to residence work	7
Course content was difficult to understand	4
Missed having an instructor to consult	4
Personal reasons	3
Found it too time-consuming	3
Unprepared for course content—insufficient background	3
No library facilities readily available	3
Entered Armed Forces	3
Found that course was not needed	2
Lost too much time getting the textbook	2
Instructor was too exacting	2
Did not want to take course at all—it was a repeat of a failure—student felt she was too irresponsible for correspondence work	1
Dropped course on advice of instructor	1
Slowness in grading caused disinterest	1
Took for refresher only—did not plan to finish	1

quency of occurrence. Data with respect to the findings of this particular aspect of the questionnaire are contained in Table IV.

In an effort to obtain some type of comparison with correspondence instruction and residence instruction, the students were asked to register their observations with respect to their correspondence courses in terms of quality and quantity of work. Table V presents a comparison of correspondence work to residence work as reported by the students in this study. The responses are listed in order of frequency of occurrence.

In view of the high percentage of correspondence students failing to complete their work as originally intended at the time of enrollment, suggestions were solicited through Item 5 of the questionnaire which would probably reduce the number of cor-

TABLE IV

Factors which Contributed to Disinterest,
Leading to Non-completion, after Having Attempted the Work

Factors	*Frequency*
No disinterest—just lack of time to complete work	38
No response indicated	19
Background was inadequate for course material	13
No instructor contact	12
Too time-consuming—too much work required for individual lessons	12
Employment interferred with study	11
Instructor required too much detail in answers—too exacting	9
Also taking residence work	6
Writing out all the lessons was too tedious	6
Rescheduled to residence work after attempting correspondence	5
Too much outside reading	5
Lacked sufficient drive or motivation to complete course	4
Too much copying straight from book—no challenge	4
Many questions seemed pointless and vague—seemed instructors just wanted to see how much one would write	4
Lack of instructor comment—slowness of grading	4
No library facilities available	4
Illness	3
Not interested in the subject ("I *never* liked Grammar!")	3
Could not get some required materials	3
Had no proper study atmosphere	2
No class discussion	2
Grades were discouraging	2
Other interests interfered	1
Entered Armed Forces	1

TABLE V

Comparison of Correspondence Instruction to Residence Instruction with Respect to the Quality and Quantity of Work Required

Nature of Response	*Frequency*
Found that correspondence required much more work	32
Lack of classroom contact lessens interest	29
Felt that both are about the same, all in all	25
No response	20
Found correspondence less interesting without as much incentive to work on it	13
Unable to make a comparison	11
Felt that the quality was equal to residence work	7
Needed to discuss course content with someone else	6
Found correspondence quite comprehensive	5
Thought too much time was wasted on irrelevant questions	4
Found correspondence much harder to understand	4
Felt that correspondence required less work	3
Time element involved contributed to disinterest—too much time between asking a question and getting the answer to it	3
Correspondence was not as good	2
Grading is harder in correspondence	2
Felt that more weight should be given to all the work that is submitted on assignments—felt that so much work otherwise was a waste of time	2
Felt that much time was spent writing answers (copying from book) without really absorbing any knowledge from the material	1
Favored correspondence because of its accessibility to students wherever they are	1
Disliked being graded on mistakes before knowing what they were	1
Time limit hindered completion	1

respondence dropouts. Responses to this particular item are summarized in Table VI. Items are arranged beginning with those occurring most frequently.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The courses dropped or cancelled by the 135 students did not seem to indicate that the nature of course content was a contributing factor to non-completion of work.
2. Responses to the item seeking to ascertain the purpose for enrolling in correspondence courses were primarily confined to

four categories. The responses checked most often and the frequency of their occurrence are as follows:

a. Degree Requirements 60
b. Self-improvement 43
c. Certification purposes 15
d. Repeat because of failure of low grade 10

Other purposes were written in by the students. A complete tabulation of the responses to this item of the questionnaire is detailed in Table II, page 8.

TABLE VI

Suggestions that Would Probably Reduce the Number of Correspondence Study Dropouts or Cancellations

Suggestion	*Frequency*
No response	55
Allow time extensions for a nominal fee for valid reasons such as illness	12
Reduce number and extent of lessons	8
More thorough criticism from instructors	8
Explain lessons in more detail and simplify instructions	8
Need courses with less writing and more emphasis on learning the material	7
Make a regular deadline (perhaps monthly) for assignments to be done	4
Have more reference aid	3
Send a reminder that expiration is forthcoming as an added incentive	3
Give more than one test—would indicate what is being learned and would also give strudents a chance to see what is expected on the final examination	2
Comprehensive textbooks are a must	2
Conduct a once-a-month class for discussion	1
Initiate a guidance program for correspondence students	1
Offer more non-technical courses	1
Screen enrollees more thoroughly	1
True-false questions would eliminate much writing	1
Allow only one course at a time—to be finished before enrolling for a second	1
Give some thought to how long it takes to prepare a lesson (student suggested a one-hour limit)	1
Prepare the lessons (content and time required to prepare an assignment) with some thought given to the age level of the student (high school suggestion)	1

3. Since approximately one-third of all correspondence enrollees do not pursue their courses to a satisfactory completion, an effort was made, through Item II of the questionnaire, to elicit from the students the reasons for non-completion of their courses as originally intended. The responses were tallied under twenty different headings or reasons. Many students gave more than one reason for non-completion of their work. Approximately three-fourths, seventy-five per cent, of the reasons registered by the students were confined to four categories. These are listed here with the frequency of response for each.

   a. Job required too much time—interfered with study 41
   b. Lack of time 40
   c. Taking residence work at the same time 29
   d. Lost interest—found correspondence work boring, uninspiring 12

   Other reasons given for non-completion of work are included in Table III, page 8.

4. Item III of the survey instrument sought an expression from the student with respect to those factors that possibly contributed to disinterest, thereby interfering with a planned work schedule for the preparation and submission of completed assignments. Seven factors listed most often by the students and the frequency of their occurrence are as follows:

   a. No disinterest—just lack of time to complete work 38
   b. No response registerd 19
   c. Background was inadequate for course 13
   d. No instructor contact 13
   e. Too time-consuming—too much work required for individual lessons 12
   f. Employment interfered with study 11
   g. Instructor required too much detail in answers—too exacting 9

   Other factors registered by the students with respect to this specific item are listed in Table IV, page 9.

5. The students were asked to compare correspondence instruction to residence instruction with respect to quality and quantity of work required, provided they had taken similar courses by both media of teaching. It is interesting to note from Table V, page 9, that correspondence instruction not only compared favorably to residence instruction, but, in many respects, was preferable to residence work. The responses to this item were tallied according to similarity of comparison and grouped, according to frequency of response, under twenty different headings.

   A total of 172 responses were registered to this item of the questionnaire. Of this number, 130, or 70.6 per cent, were confined to six areas. These are listed here with the frequency of response for each area indicated. It is apparent that some students made more than one comparison.

   a. Found that correspondence study required much more work 32
   b. Lack of classroom contact lessens interest 29
   c. Felt that both media of instruction were about the same 25
   d. No response 20
   e. Found correspondence work less interesting— not much incentive to do work as required 13
   f. Unable to make a comparison 11

   Other responses with respect to this item are given in detail in Table V, page 10.

6. Not only was an effort made to identify those factors contributing to noncompletion of correspondence courses; the students were asked to offer suggestions which would probably reduce correspondence dropouts and cancellations. Nineteen different categories of suggestions were offered. These are listed in Table VI, page 11. Examination of Table VI reveals that 55 students did not respond to this item of the questionnaire. Twelve students suggested reasonable time extensions for valid reasons, such as illness. Reduce number of lessons, more constructive criticism from instructors, and clarification of lessons were suggested by eight stdents for each category. Other suggestions offered are detailed in Table VI, page 11.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That correspondence study guides have a variety of assignments including more questions of a thought-provoking nature rather than questions requiring transfer of answers from the textbook or reference sources.
2. That instructors offer more suggestions and helpful criticisms by registering their comments and remarks on the evaluated assignments returned to the students.
3. That some provision be made for time extensions if the reason seems to warrant consideration for additional time.
4. That the assignments or lessons be reduced, not with respect to the quality of work required or expected, but with respect to the amount of writing often required in the preparation of assignments.
5. That more than one examination be required of a course.
6. That more non-technical courses be made available by correspondence.
7. That some provision be made to screen enrollees who apply for correspondence work.

APPENDIX A

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SURVEY ON DROP-OUTS AND CANCELLATIONS

A concerted effort is being made to ascertain why correspondence students drop out or fail to complete their courses before the expiration of the enrollment period. It would be appreciated if you would respond to the five items of this questionnaire and return it in the enclosed prepaid envelope.

Name _____ County _____ State _____ Country _____

Course name and number _____ Date _____

A. What was your original purpose in enrolling for this course?

____ Degree Requirement	____ Repeat because of failure
____ Certification purposes	or low grade
____ Self-improvement	____ Suggested by advisor
____ Refresher course	____ Unable to schedule
____ Accelerate program	____ Other:_____
____ Financial–cost less	_____

B. Why were you unable to complete this course as originally planned? _____

_____

_____

C. What were some of the factors that contributed to disinterest after having attempted the work required of this course?

_____

_____

_____

D. In comparing correspondence instruction to residence instruction, what are some of your observations with respect to the quality and quantity of work required? _____

_____

_____

E. What suggestions do you have to offer that would probably reduce the number of correspondence study drop-outs or cancellations? _____

_____

_____

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